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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to use the case-study approach to look at how a secondary school endeavors to improve its quality by introducing a new subject curriculum in its junior section. The innovation has proven to be a success, but the entire process has been both painful and enjoyable. It was found that to introduce the new curriculum, the principal and the chairperson of the subject department had to tackle a number of problems. These included poorly adjusted and poorly equipped students and a demoralized faculty used to a teacher-centered approach. The results of the study show that curriculum innovation is a complex process, and sometimes clear goals and carefully formulated implementation plans are not the best strategies. Results also suggest that the administration needs to create a proper environment before a reform or innovation is carried out. The results further demonstrate that interest in learning is still the heart of quality education, even with poorly adjusted and poorly equipped students. Finally, the results support an important principle behind the current school-based management reform: that any innovation in teaching and learning needs to be worked out by the people within the particular culture and political system of a school. (Contains 20 references.) (WFA)

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Muddling through school reforms:

A case study of how curriculum innovation became a driving force behind quality schooling

by

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Abstract

The education scene around the world in the past decade has been filled with innovations and reform strategies with the aspirations to improve school quality and student learning. Innovations and reform strategies devised at the system level, school level, or classroom level had been met with different degree of success. In Hong Kong, however, the recent school reforms introduced by the government, such as School-Based Management, Quality Assurance Inspection, Information Technology in Education, Target-Oriented Curriculum, etc., have received less favorable response. The general feeling among the teachers is that these reforms have added pressure and burden to their already busy workload, and that they are incapable of handling them. Because of the frustration and feeling of helplessness, some teachers have rejected or developed a negative attitude towards any school change, even before they can fully understand what is required of them, and long before they could harness any fruits of these reforms (Sarason, 1990). It is therefore prudent for a school to carefully devise strategies to implement any reform or improvement measure.

The purpose of this paper is to use case study approach to look at how a secondary school endeavors to improve its quality by introducing a new subject curriculum in its junior section. The innovation has proven to be a success and has contributed to enjoyable learning felt by the students, increased satisfaction and efficacy felt by the teachers, and improved overall quality of the school, but the entire process has been both painful and enjoyable. Nevertheless, the experience itself has been a lesson worthy of learning. It was found that in order to introduce the new curriculum, the principal and the chairperson of the subject department have to tackle with a number of problems. These include poorly adjusted and poorly equipped students, which may lead to lots of behavioral problems; heterogeneous grouping of students, which may mean having a wide range of ability within the same class; a demoralized faculty who is used to a teacher-centered approach in teaching and who mainly relies on position power to manage their students; and an organizational norm which is characterized by contrived collegiality and Balkanization of teaching (Hargreaves, 1994).

The result of this study shows that curriculum innovation is indeed a complex process and sometimes clear goals and carefully formulated implementation plans are not always the best strategies. It also suggests that the school administration needs to create an environment before a reform or innovation is carried out, and human and political leadership to be available at the department level in order to overcome the obstacles. The result further demonstrates that interest in learning is still the heart of quality education, even with poorly adjusted and poorly equipped students. Finally, the result of the present study supports an important principle behind the current school-based management reform—that any innovation in teaching and learning needs to be worked out by the people within the particular culture and political system of a school.

Muddling through school reforms:
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Introduction

Since the Second World War, there was tremendous growth in education in many countries—growth both in number of students in school and growth in what was being spent on them. With such apparently unending expansion, there was a feeling of optimism, that as long as there are sufficient school places, enough supply of teachers, and adequate resources, a desirable standard of education can be achieved. Hence, in many of the national systems, the priority was in the quantity of schooling—to build more schools and train enough teachers. A reaction against this kind of growth and optimism emerged in the early 1970s, coinciding with the financial problems associated with oil prices and international competition, first in Great Britain and the United States, and later to the other developed countries. During this time, the public demanded better quality in the schooling system. In midst of such climate, schools were under great pressure to undertake changes, parents demanded greater information or involvement; government bureaucrats and the policy makers wanted greater efficiency and value for money; teachers were attacked for inefficiency or using the wrong teaching strategies, etc.

Therefore, the educational scene around the world in the past decade has been filled with innovations and reform strategies to deal with social demand to improve school quality and student learning. Innovations and reform strategies devised at the system level, school level, or classroom level had been met with different degree of success.

Hong Kong education system follows the megatrend development of the world closely. Before, the return of sovereignty back to mainland China, Hong Kong has already undertaken a series of educational reforms. These include the introduction of School Management Initiatives (1991), which becomes a territory-wide school-based management reform for all schools in 1999, the implementation of Target-Oriented Curriculum starting in the primary schools in 1994, the aggressive information technology in education program for all schools in 1997, the introduction of a quality assurance system for school inspection in 1998, to name just a few. However, these educational reforms have not received a favorable response from

the schools. The general feeling among the teachers is that these reforms have added pressure and burden to their already busy workload, and that they are incapable of handling them.

It is understandable why the schools, in general, do not welcome the recent educational reforms (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). First, teachers teach an average of 30 to 35 periods of lesson per week, hence their schedules are hectic. Second, schools are event oriented, school affairs are usually stressful, and there are tight control mechanisms set up to minimize uncertainties, which gives little freedom to teachers to decide what they want and how they do their work. Third, primary and secondary teachers prefer to work in isolation, and their work tend to be repetitive in nature, lacking access to new ideas. Fourth, schools organizations in Hong Kong are bureaucratic in nature, teachers are generally passive and follow instructions made by the administrators. Fifth, most of the teachers are unfamiliar with the reform agenda due to lack of knowledge to understand them, hence, to these teachers, educational reforms always carry the meaning of top-down demand from the Education Department, requiring them to do more work and spending more time in school.

Because of the frustration and feeling of helplessness, some teachers have either rejected or developed a negative attitude towards any school change, even before they can fully understand what is required of them, and long before they could harness any fruits of these reforms (Sarason, 1990). Moreover, negative feelings usually have an echoing effect, which tends to permeate through the school organization, making other teachers feel depressed. Facing much resistance, school administrators find it difficult to implement school reforms dictated by the Education Department with a concerted effort.

Adding to the problems mentioned above, the school organization is a complicated entity. It has been variously called coalitions of powerful constituencies (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), garbage cans (March & Olsen, 1976), psychic prisons (Morgan, 1980), social contracts (Keeley, 1980), etc., depending on how people perceive it. Ginsburg (1991) views educational reform in terms of the processes of ideological and social struggles taking place in the context of contradictory economic, political and cultural dynamics. There are times when a reform does take place in a school organization which is filled with political turmoil (Hoyle, 1986), the situation becomes very difficult to comprehend. By that time, not only the teachers, but the administrators are also at a loss of what to do and where to go.

In this paper, we argue that if one has to implement educational reform in a school where the environment is unstable, and where educational reform is seen more as an enemy than as a friend, the rational model of planning and implementation may not always work. It

may be justified for the teachers to muddle a little in the change mess before finding their way out.

The school selected for this study is MCHK School, which is a secondary school established in the 1950's and is operated by a Christian denomination. It is considered as a standard size school with 30 classes running from secondary one to seven, and approximately 1200 student enrollment. It is a caput school, which means that the school receives subsidy from the government mainly based on the number of students studying in the school. Since this funding arrangement is rather similar to the private bought-place schools, therefore, in the eyes of the public, this is a private school. Nevertheless, the government has not made a clear identification whether it should be classified as a public school or a private school. Because of its ambiguous status, plus other historical reasons, this school was not well received by the community and it was receiving students of rather poor quality ever since the government began its secondary student allocation system in the 1970's.

In a way, the MCHK School is similar to all other secondary schools in Hong Kong. It retains a rather traditional mode of management, with decision power centralized in the hands of the principal and a few senior administrators. Like most of the schools with academically poorly prepared students, there is heavy workload, low teacher morale, many student behavioral problems, and most of the energy of the teachers has gone into fire fighting.

Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to employ qualitative case study approach to investigate the complicated process behind a curriculum innovation project. The focus of the investigation is on the preparation and implementation of a new Social Studies curriculum in the past two years at the MCHK School. The use of qualitative case studies has become increasing popular in management studies and school effectiveness research, and is recognized as a method of developing our understanding of the ways in which different aspects of the functioning of schools can influence teacher and student performances (Reynolds, 1992; Levin, 1992). Case study research can illuminate the complex interactions of context, organization, norms, policies and practices that help to generate a quality school program. It can also demonstrate how similar or different approaches and strategies are adopted in different schools identified as good (Hargreaves, 1995). Case study can be seen as

a small step towards grand generalization (Campbell, 1975), although generalization is not necessarily an important goal of all research endeavor (Simon, 1980). However, speculations on the applicability of findings to other situations under similar, though not identical, conditions can often be made. Such speculations can be useful when based on information-rich samples which are carefully selected and targeted to answer the questions being raised (Patton, 1987).

Techniques such as questionnaire survey, personal interviews, observations, and document analysis were employed for the present study. Documents such as the minutes of various committees were examined to find out how the decision to implement the new curriculum was made. Also, the structure and contents of the new Social Studies curriculum was analyzed. A short quantitative survey for the Secondary One and Secondary Two students was conducted to examine how the students perceive the new curriculum as well as the teaching and learning process. Lesson observations of two of the Social Studies teachers were made. Finally, interviews were conducted on Mr. Lam, the principal, Mr. Chan, the vice principal, Miss Wong, the Social Studies panel chairperson, Miss Tam, Miss Yeung, Miss Lau, and Miss Ho, the other four Social Studies teachers.

Result and Discussion

In the following section, the researcher attempted to trace the background and the events that took place throughout the curriculum innovation project of MCHK School. It is divided into two parts: the conception stage describes the rationale behind the innovation and the preparation for it; the implementation stage describes how the innovation was carried out and its perceived outcomes.

The Conception Stage

There has been a well-established Social Studies curriculum for secondary students proposed by the Education Department since the 1970's, and many well-written textbooks in the market. The curriculum was designed as a replacement of the History, Geography, and Economic and Public Affairs (EPA) subjects in the junior secondary curriculum, which were seen as too academic for the average students. However, after twenty years of existence and several revisions, the curriculum was still not well received by the schools. Less than one-third of the secondary schools is using the curriculum. The main reason, according to the

principal,

> "Because most parents want a more academically rigorous curriculum for their children regardless of their ability, so that they will be more prepared for senior secondary level. It is like the medium of instruction issue—most parents know that their children will have a hard time comprehending instructions in English, but they still want them to study in an English medium school. Therefore, if you (the school) do something that is unpopular, the parents will not choose your school. It is as simple as this." (Mr. Lam)

Therefore, the school must have met some resistance when the curriculum was introduced. When the researcher asked why the school introduced the Social Studies curriculum, the Social Studies Panel head said,

> "The reasons that I can understand are: (1) There are too many subjects in the junior forms; (2) The three subjects (History, Geography, EPA) are too heavy for the students; (3) The school expects to integrate daily life issues into the curriculum so that there can be more 'whole-person development' for the students." (Miss Wong)

The academic vice principal also echoed these reasons:

> "Because the junior secondary curriculum kept on expanding (such as the addition of Putonghua subject), therefore the Curriculum Development Committee decided to consolidate it by combining History, Geography, and EPA into Social Studies subject and to incorporate civic education into it. These subjects were quite difficult and boring so I agreed to scrap them. There were some teachers who opposed to the new curriculum. I guess they were afraid once the new curriculum was implemented, they might become redundant and the school would find a reason to lay them off." (Mr. Chan)

It was interesting for Mr. Chan to mention the Curriculum Development Committee because few teachers were aware of the existence of this committee. Documents showed that the committee was set up by the principal in 1997 with the purpose of reviewing the curriculum of the school, but the committee no longer existed after that school year. Among the members in the committee were three vice principals, the academic dean and the Chinese panel head. In 1997, a paper entitled "Christian Education for the 21st century: A position paper on the development of academic affairs of MCHK School" was published by the committee. Two recommendations of this paper that are relevant here were to consolidate the

curriculum and to introduce a personal and social education curriculum in the junior section. The paper was presented to the faculty in April, 1997, but nobody remembered any follow-up work or any discussion among the faculty after that. In order to understand this part of history, the principal was interviewed.

"How did you come up with these ideas of Curriculum Development Committee and Social Studies subject in this school?" (The researcher)

"I was the principal of this school for five years before I went for further studies and then I worked in other places for a while. When I came back to this school in 1997, I wanted to make many changes. These were very ambitious changes, and were similar to some of the school reforms that the Educational Commission is proposing now. Therefore, I set up the Curriculum Development Committee with the purpose of selling my ideas to the members and getting a reform agenda on the table. I collected their opinions about the school curriculum and wrote a position paper. But I guess I was too aggressive and too naïve, thinking that everything could be done by being open-minded and having a willingness to learn. There were lots of ideas in that paper, but they were very vague and were not sufficiently discussed among the faculty. The Academic Affairs Committee at that time was too weak to bring about any large-scale change in the curriculum. Also, I was not having good rapport with the teachers because they were afraid that I would change things too fast. Furthermore, there were some political turmoil within the senior administration and the school board. I was frustrated and depressed. Therefore, I decided to abandon the original recommendations in the position paper and make small-scale changes instead. At that time, I felt Social Studies would be welcome by the teachers. Later on, I found out I was also wrong to assume this." (Mr. Lam)

"How did you introduce the subject and what resistance did you meet?"(The researcher)

"I first consulted with the History, Geography and EPA teachers to discuss the possibility of offering Social Studies instead of the three subjects in the junior forms. I felt a lot of oppositions coming from the teachers. They raised a lot of questions about the new subject, some were technical and some were ideological. I appreciated them for these questions but there were many problems I could not solve for them. Then, it took a long time before I realized I was not dealing with the most important issue. The

important issue was about power: how the three panels would position themselves if the new curriculum was introduced and who would be the head of the new subject panel. Throughout the consultation, the administrators were relatively silent on this matter. I guess the administrators supported this plan in private but they were afraid they would make themselves unpopular if they openly support me. I felt I was fighting a lonely battle." (Mr. Lam)

"Were you afraid that your plan may fail if you did not get enough support?" (The researcher)

"It is difficult to say whether something has succeeded or failed in a school program. But I was quite worried at that time. For one thing, it may take months for the various committees to treat all the ideological issues and solve the technical problems that the teachers raised. Also, if the teachers were opposed to the curriculum, how can I ensure that they would do a good job in teaching the subject? I had to rely on them. I can't remember why I did this, but at that time, I decided to bypass all the decision-making channels. I announced in a written memorandum that I wanted to introduce Social Studies beginning in Secondary One the following year. I gave the rationale for it and requested teachers who were interested to teach to volunteer themselves. About ten teachers, mostly young ones, responded favorably. I felt relieved." (Mr. Lam)

"Then how did you select your teachers?" (The researcher)

"I did not choose the teachers. I first chose the panel head. There were several persons in my mind. I knew I needed a Social Science person who has the subject knowledge. He/she should be a person with human skills to lead a team, and the sensitivity to deal with the administrators and other panel heads. I chose Miss Wong. She had the quality that I needed and she was a capable person. She was the panel head of Economics and EPA subjects, as well as the chairperson of Civic Education Committee. Miss Wong did not want to do it in the beginning but I am sorry to say that I literally used my authority to drag her into it. After she consented to be the panel head, we selected the other teachers together." (Mr. Lam)

It appears from the above dialogs that the principal first employed a rational approach of school change by using a formal channel to promote his ideas to the teachers. After

realizing that the ground was not fertile enough to formulate the ideas into concrete plans, he then took an easier route by introducing a small-scale change only. He did this high-handedly by sidestepping all the proper decision-making channels and forcing a senior teacher into accepting the panel headship. The principal must have his reasons to do these, but it surely gives people an impression of lacking long-term plans and working with an unstable administration. Nevertheless, who knows what the best school change strategy should be employed if there were political turmoil within the senior administration and the school board. Also, one thing worth noting about this school is the feeling of insecurity among the teachers, that they worry more about their position (and power) than whether they are doing something worthwhile for the students.

The Implementation

According to Miss Wong, the five Social Studies teachers spent two summers in 1998 and 1999 to prepare for the new curriculum. They continued to work on the curriculum throughout the school year. They did an extensive research on what was available in Hong Kong, how the publishers presented the material, and what the other schools were doing. They divided themselves into groups to prepare material for certain topics and then came back together to discuss them.

"First of all, the principal wanted this to be a school-based curriculum because this will better fit students' needs. Then we tried to find out what the students need and see whether we (five of us) can integrate our materials into the curriculum. The entire curriculum was conceptualized, designed, and written as a combined effort of the five Social Studies teachers. We pulled ideas from here and there and came up with a framework that we all felt comfortable about. We even discuss the test and examination questions and worked out the answer key together. I remember many times we worked together until late in the evening. I don't know how we got the energy to do this."

(Miss Wong)

"What kind of support did you get from the school?" (The researcher)

"There was no support from the school. There was no reduced workload, no clerical help. We performed the same amount of summer duties as the other teachers. In the last summer, the principal promised to free us from all summer duties, but in the end,

people still called us back to do different things. Sometimes we felt we were being cheated by the school, but we tolerated because we felt we are really doing something for our students." (Miss Wong)

When the researcher asked the principal why there were no support coming from the school, his reply was,

"People in this school do not believe in curriculum innovation, and I am making a general statement here. They feel that this is only something the principal wants to do for himself. If you give support in terms of resource and reduced workload to a group who is doing something innovative, other teachers will see this as favoritism and will make all kinds of criticisms behind you. Also, people are very conscious about the issue of 'fairness' in this school. If you give something to a group who is making some contributions, you better be ready to weigh everybody's contribution. There is a strange norm among the teachers in this school—that if you are doing extra work, you are aiming at a promotion, and if you side with the principal, you are 'shining his shoes'. There are actually many teachers who are doing extra things for the students in this school, but they dare not tell other people. But things are changing now. After one year of implementation (of Social Studies), people are beginning to see the benefits of curriculum innovation and realized that it is very hard work. I think we (the administration) are more ready to give these teachers the support they need." (Mr. Lam)

The Social Studies curriculum was an innovation because nobody had done anything like this before in Hong Kong. It partly followed a western model of personal and social education in that approximately half of the content incorporates elements of moral education, civic, sex, health, and environmental education, and the other half contains elements of History, Geography, and EPA.

"At first, nobody was aware of what we were doing. The teachers didn't even know that we were teaching a new subject. Most of the people here work in isolation. There were little communication between groups. Everybody was busy doing his/her own work that people just couldn't care too much about what other people are doing. There were only very few teachers noticed and appreciated our effort. It was the people from the Education Department and the universities who came to inspect our work told us that this was an innovation nobody had done before. I am happy that we have done this and I am proud of my team." (Miss Wong)

The researcher went to observe the lesson of Miss Wong. The lesson was about making choices. It was a Secondary one class and there were thirty-six students in the room. The students were divided into seven groups and they were actively participating in the activities led by the teacher. There were some discussions, some debates, and some worksheets. Although the noise level of the room was high, the teacher handled the atmosphere of the class very well. After the lesson, the researcher asked,

"How was this class different from the other classes you taught in this school?"

(The researcher)

"The students in this class were more active and were more willing to think and speak out. The curriculum is designed to achieve this. In the other classes (other subjects), the students listened passively to the teachers and they agreed with everything the teachers say, or if they don't, they will not tell you. But this group is different. They are not afraid of making mistakes. Actually, in this school, we had been spoon-feeding the students for too long and they could only remember what they teachers asked them to remember. There was no personal opinion, and no identity." (Miss Wong)

"Why did you divide the students into groups?" (The researcher)

"Because the school uses heterogeneous grouping method in the junior forms, which means random assignment of students into the six classes. This will result in having some smarter kids and some slower ones within the same class, and this puts a lot of pressure on the teachers. So we thought of using cooperative learning approach. We divided the students into groups, and each group has a mixture of smart ones and slower ones. In this way, the smart ones can help the slower ones and they both gain from it."

(Miss Wong)

"Were there any problems with student discipline?" (The researcher)

"The students were more active than the normal classes and naturally the noise level would be higher. But I think they are acceptable. One thing I found out was that teaching an activity oriented lesson is much harder than teaching a traditional lesson. You need to be more alert, respond faster, prepare more, and use more human approach to handle deviant behavior. Fortunately, none of us had any difficult discipline problems so far. Moreover, student discipline was much improved this year. I cannot

say that we contributed to this improvement. Yet I feel students would be much better behaved if they are confident about themselves and they know what they are doing in school." (Miss Wong)

The researcher then asked Miss Wong and the other Social Studies teachers about the feedback they received from the students and how they felt about the subject.

"Yes, I think the students liked the lessons, and all five of us are satisfied with what we are doing. We feel we are making a real contribution to the students. At first, we did not know how and where to start, so we simply copied what other people had done. We completed the first draft of the curriculum last summer. It was full of mistake and the concepts were not well presented. This year we made a revision of the Secondary One curriculum and we felt we've made a lot of progress. Also, I feel there was real professional development here. Now I can scrutinize other people's curriculum and quickly tell whether it is good or not." (Miss Wong)

"When we first planned the curriculum, we were told that we should develop a new approach in teaching and learning—to integrate knowledge with daily living. By doing this, we hoped the students could become more wholesome and thoughtful persons. Before we designed our curriculum, we put in a lot of efforts in outside reading and searched for related material, and we purposely added a lot of activities into the curriculum to make the lessons more interesting. Unfortunately, the heavy workload in this school sometimes prohibited me from putting in enough time to prepare my lessons and it is like depriving my students the right to learn. Also, teaching students in a group setting was a new experience to me. I am now more confident in managing student behavior."

(Miss Ho)

"I feel the students liked our lessons. They gave a lot of feedback to me. As for myself, I like what I am doing. I feel I have grown a lot professionally by doing this. In the beginning of my teaching career, I taught directly from the text. Now I can design my own curriculum and teaching activities. It was hard work, but I feel it helped me in my profession." (Miss Tam)

"The curriculum puts a lot of attention on personal development, and I think this is

helpful to the students. And I think there is personal and professional development for myself. I gained much from organizing the content and writing the lessons."(Miss Yeung)

"I like teaching this subject because I feel I have a mission. Also, I appreciate my panel head very much because she respects our opinions." (Miss Lau)

The researcher did a simple survey of the opinions of the students about the Social Studies curriculum (See Table 1). The survey was administered to 213 S1 students and 214 S2 students and the return rate for both groups was 100%. Among the students who responded, 56% said they were interested in the subject; 85% felt the activities were helpful to their learning; 71% felt the subject was useful; 77% said they participated actively in class; and 75% were confident that they could get good grades in the subject. In sum, the students, in general, felt positively about the subject.

From the information being gathered, it appeared that the students were interested in learning the subject. They were confident about their own learning, participated well and behaved well in class. Also, the teachers were enthusiastic and confident about their teaching. Despite the lack of support from the school, they were willing to put in effort and time to look for material and write their own curriculum. They also felt they were growing professionally by doing this. These were all qualities of effective teaching and learning (Mortimore et. al, 1988). Moreover, it appeared that there was good teamwork among the teachers and they were satisfied with what they had done.

When the principal was asked what he felt about the result, his response was enthusiastic.

"This has turned out to be far better than what I had expected. This is a good curriculum and they have worked very hard for the sake of the students. I appreciate their efforts very much. Although this is not the only team that is making good contributions to the school, the outcomes they brought about are far-reaching. It is like creating a miracle for this school. The people believe in the power of learning now. They are more willing to put in effort to design school-based curriculum for the students. It has helped me too. I feel more confident about my work in this school and the direction we are heading."

(Mr. Lam)

To summarize the findings of this section, the principal initially proposed a large-scale reform for the school, but it was later scaled down into a smaller curriculum innovation, due to internal problems. However, by selecting the appropriate personnel at the departmental level, the innovation turned out to be a success and have far-reaching impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. In this innovation, the principal appeared to have done three things. Firstly, he set the vision for the innovation. The vision began with a large-scale reform in mind, but was later narrowed down to a manageable program—to consolidate the junior secondary curriculum and to integrate personal and social education elements into the curriculum. Secondly, he used his position power to pave the path for the innovation. Thirdly, he selected a good panel head—a person who has the human skills to carry out the task. At the departmental level, the panel head concentrated on the task of teambuilding. She was involved in choosing the team members and succeeded in building a shared vision among them. She worked with them closely, praised their contributions openly, and reminded them of the good work they were doing for the students.

Table 1. Survey result of the opinions of S1 & S2 students about Social Studies.

	Yes	Average / no opinion	No
1. Are you interested in this subject?	56%	39%	5%
2. Do you think the activities are helpful to your learning?	85%	--	15%
3. Do you think the subject is useful?	71%	24%	5%
4. Do you have confidence in getting good results in this subject?	75%	1%	24%
5. Did you participate actively in class?	77%	22%	1%

Conclusions and Implications

The present study explored the complicated process behind a curriculum innovation project in a secondary school. After analyzing carefully the results being presented, the following conclusions, implications and recommendations can be made.

First, there are times when a reform takes place in a school organization which is filled with political turmoil (Hoyle, 1986) or ambiguities (March & Olsen, 1976), the situation is not always easy to comprehend clearly. There are also times when there are so many reforms

being introduced at one time that it gives people a feeling of being caught in a big mess. In fact, this is actually the general feeling of teachers in Hong Kong in the past two years when too many change initiatives were introduced one after the other. Under these circumstances, one may not have a good grasp of the situation before implementing a school reform, and may have to walk one step at a time before finding a way out. Muddling through school reforms may be a common phenomena rather than an exceptional case. And it is far better to have muddled through than being caught in a big mess and have everybody feeling confused and frustrated (Sarason, 1990).

Second, it is not always easy to set clear goals and devise detail plans for a school reform, especially when the school has no prior experience in managing school reform. One should look at school reform as a learning process where people learn and make sense of what they are doing while they are involved in it. Fullan (1993) made a similar point when he described school change as a journey rather than a blueprint for action.

Third, there needs to be both top-down and bottom-up efforts in promoting school reforms (Fullan, 1993). Even with the best intentions, top-down approaches usually produce feelings of frustration and alienation among the teachers. Time and again, it has been shown that ownership and empowerment are the keys to success in innovation (Ball, 1994). Yet, without administrative support at the school level, individual efforts may not have significant effect and cannot last long. Also, without policy initiatives from the system, a school simply cannot perform large-scale reform. The Education Department, the school administrators and the front-line teachers need to collaborate together in order to bring about true reform in schools.

Fourth, reform strategies need to be designed to fit the school context. In the school reform literature, there is no 'best' or 'worst' strategy. Whatever works in a certain situation is an appropriate strategy for that situation. In the present case, a direct command from the principal has done much to pave the path for a curriculum innovation. Dunham and Pierce (1989) suggested seven general change strategies to match different situations. These are education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitative support, emotional support, incentives, manipulation and cooptation, and coercion. Some of the situations are time factor, knowledge factor, political climate, organizational norm, availability of appropriate personnel, etc. This implies that in order to achieve the best results, reform endeavors should be made into a school-based effort. An implication to the current systemic

curriculum reform is that innovations in teaching and learning should be worked out by the people within the particular culture and political context of a school.

Fifth, the findings of the present study suggest that in a curriculum innovation, the sense of mission is a driving force, and team spirit among the teachers is the lubricant at the departmental level. This suggests that leadership is an important factor in promoting curriculum innovation, and the most essential components in curriculum leadership is visioning and team-building.

Finally, the findings of the study suggest that effective learning can be a solution to many discipline problems. Despite the teaching of traditional wisdom, which says, "Discipline comes before pedagogy", the result suggests that teaching and managing student behavior go hand in hand. When the students are engaged in learning, and they are confident about learning, they should not have much motivation to cause trouble. This is true even with the academically poorly prepared and behaviorally poorly adjusted students (Slavin, 1991). Since interest in learning is a powerful treatment for misbehavior and a source of motivation for the lowly motivated learners, curriculum innovation and effective teaching should be placed at the heart of any reform endeavor to improve education quality (Glasser, 1992).

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

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4.7 Summary and recommendations

4.7.1 The Division of Community Care and its partners have to participate in 'whole of government' community-building activities and in activities that support the broad government objects of pursuing community economic and social wellbeing.

4.7.2 The Division of Community Care has to develop the capacity to plan, design, deliver and evaluate services appropriate to the articulated needs of specific Community Zones, in partnership with communities and stakeholder organisations, including local governments, CSOs, schools and other bodies, including the private sector.

4.7.3 The Government has to consider establishing VicWork to assist Victorian communities and families to establish the connection between economic and social wellbeing and work by informing, educating and linking families with international technological and market changes to work, thereby identifying the competencies required in order to benefit from global change.